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KREMLIN OLD HANDS OUSTED

By NIGEL WADE
in Moscow

MR GORBACHEV has retired six government ministers and one deputy prime minister since taking over Kremlin power in March.

The average age of those sent on pension is 72 and their average length of service is

over 16 years. One had served for 31 years and three for 20 years or more.

But the longest-serving minister, Mr Pyotr Lomako, 81, in charge of non-ferrous metallurgy, is still in office. Having been appointed in 1940. He made a speech only last week.

Public criticism

The six ministers retired were those for power and electricity, transport construction, steel, light industry, building materials and higher education. These are all areas targeted for criticism by Mr Gorbachev, 54, in his demands for efficiency and modernisation.

The ministers for steel and building materials were criticised publicly by Mr Gorbachev last month.

President Brezhnev occasionally also chastised his ministers publicly but left them in place. The light industry minister, dismissed by Mr Gorbachev, was more than once criticised by Mr Brezhnev for the failings of consumer goods production. It was not Mr Brezhnev's style to "make waves" by dismissals.

Mr Gorbachev has no such compunction and is making good his promise to bring in younger men at the top. The six new ministers replacing those retired are in their 50s and 60s. More of the total of 65 ministers are expected to go as Mr Gorbachev drives home his warning that they must quicken their step or step aside.

Mr Gromyko, 76, the veteran Foreign Minister, was given the ceremonial job of State Presi-

dent early this month and was replaced by Mr Eduard Shevardnadze, 57.

Politburo allies

Everywhere the accent is on youth. Mr Gorbachev also demands practical expertise, although the new Foreign Minister is an exception, having no direct experience of diplomacy.

Changes in the government leadership follow the appointment of four young Gorbachev allies to the Communist party's ruling Politburo. Changes are also underway within the administrative departments of the party central committee.

A reshuffle of military commanders is believed to be afoot, following the replacement of the Soviet commander in East Germany, but details have not been officially revealed.

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Marshal Ogarkov plans a high-tech Warsaw Pact

from MARK FRANKLAND in Moscow

MARSHAL Nikolai Ogarkov, the brilliant Soviet soldier who lost his job as Chief of Staff last September, now seems set to become commander of the Warsaw Pact.

Usually well-informed Soviet sources said yesterday that the appointment will be announced shortly. East Europeans began rumours of Ogarkov's resurrection earlier in the week, and this roundabout way of leaking the news suggests it is a matter of considerable political delicacy.

Marshal Ogarkov will replace Marshal Viktor Kulikov, who has led the Warsaw Pact since 1977. They are very different sorts of soldier. Ogarkov is an engineer, an intellectual and a prophet of the high-tech battlefield. Kulikov, four years younger is a more straightforward officer who made his name

in tanks. They are widely supposed to be rivals.

Ogarkov never fell entirely into disgrace but his power was indisputably cut by losing control of the General Staff and his rank as First Deputy Minister of Defence (a title he should regain as Warsaw Pact commander). It looks as though disagreement with the late President Chernenko, who is reported to have felt uneasy with the abrasively self-confident marshal, was one reason for Ogarkov's eclipse.

The Politburo may also have wanted to take Ogarkov out of the running for the post of Defence Minister which became vacant in December on the death of Marshal Ustinov.

Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachov seems likely to feel far more at ease with Ogarkov and with his message about the inevitability of technological change in warfare. Ogarkov

was allowed to repeat this at length in a pamphlet published earlier this summer. His arguments read like a military reflection of much of what Gorbachov has been saying about the economy.

Ogarkov's first task as Warsaw Pact chief will be to promote the introduction of new weapons and the new tactics and strategy they will make necessary. An outspoken critic of amassing more strategic nuclear weapons, he could be a positive influence on US-Soviet arms negotiations.

Further changes in conservative military ways may be forthcoming if, as is also rumoured, General Aleksei Yepishev is replaced as the chief political commissar of the armed forces. Yepishev is 77 and has had the job since 1962. He is famous for his neo-Stalinist thinking.